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**GENDER ROLES, MASCULINITY, AND MILITARISM: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING  
TO RAPE BEING USED AS A WEAPON OF WAR IN THE EASTERN DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**



by

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## **Abstract**

The purpose behind this paper is to answer the question: what is the underlying motivation for men to use rape as a weapon of war in the eastern DRC? This paper will use a qualitative case study methodology to analyze three primary internal factors that could be contributing towards the sexual violence against women. The factors that will be critically explored in this paper are the gender roles, masculinity, and militarism of the various armed groups, like the FDLR and FARDC, located in the eastern DRC. The traditional gender roles observed in the DRC will be examined as well as how conflict has changed these gender roles. Additionally, how these traditional gender roles lead to the propensity of rape taking place will be analyzed. In the end, gender roles and militarism were determined to be the primary internal factors for the use of rape as a weapon of war in the eastern DRC. Therefore, they must be taken into account when developing educational programs for the population as a way to prevent this type of crime against humanity from occurring at its current rates in the future.

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*If we go to the heart of where this comes from – it relates to the notions of masculinity, sexual violence is still about men fighting men, they are just using the vessel of a woman's body.*

*Fundamentally, it's about a lack of respect for the women and their bodies as equals.*

*Gender Advisor, UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations - Comfort Lamptey*

## **Introduction**

Gender based violence, such as rape, has been around in society from the beginning of recorded history and even though this is the case, research into the causes and effects of why rape occurs during war has only recently increased in the last two decades. This is due to the conflicts in Rwanda, the Balkans, Somalia, and Sudan where these countries were inundated with high levels of sexual violence and where rape was systematically used as a weapon of war. In Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war, rape was utilized as a tool to ethnically cleanse the population and it is estimated that 13,000 to 50,000 women were sexually assaulted during the course of the conflict. Meanwhile in Rwanda, an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 women were raped and this tactic was also used to ethnically cleanse the population.<sup>1</sup> These acts of violence played out on the world stage and were eventually brought to the forefront of many discussions and debated by non-governmental organizations, academia, the media and numerous other international organizations like the UN.

Current discussions include the DRC because this country has witnessed some of most prolific use of rape during war. Many experts on this topic would say the most horrific acts of rape have taken place in the eastern part of the country over the last 20 years of conflict. Official UN's numbers show that the recorded cases of sexual violence in the North Kivu Province of the DRC rose from 4,689 cases in 2011 to 7,075 cases being reported in 2012. Another report

provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees remarked on the sharp increase in rapes from 2012 to 2013, where there were 705 cases of sexual violence reported in the region compared to the previous year where there was only 108 cases reported.<sup>2</sup> This increase in sexual violence is directly tied to the resurgence of fighting occurring between armed groups like the M23 and the FARDC, the DRC's army, who have been vying for control of land and the resources and wealth that comes with this land.

Since this conflict has been raging there have been many reports of crimes against humanity occurring like continued ethnic massacres, summary executions, forced recruitment of children, and the systematic use of rape.<sup>3</sup> Reports such as these have continued to surface and they have compelled the international community to mobilize efforts to alleviate the increase in gender based violence committed against women by these armed groups. Albeit there are various types of gender based violence taking place like spousal abuse, human trafficking, slavery, mutilation and even forced marriage. However, the gender based violence act that has caught the attention of the international community is rape because it is the most intrusive form of violence that can take place and it disrupts the foundation of a community. This gruesome act drastically changed the international community's perception of the use of rape in during war.

Today, there is no acceptance of sexual violence, especially during conflict. This is observed by the number of humanitarian organizations dedicated to abolishing the use of sexual violence in war, the changes in international law focusing on the use of rape in war, as well as the numerous steps the United Nations has taken to become involved in trying to prevent sexual violence from transpiring. Since October 2000, the UN Security Council has passed several resolutions revolving around women and the use of sexual violence during conflicts.<sup>4</sup> To describe and bring attention to the type of violence taking place in the DRC, Margot Wallström,

the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, coined the phrase "Rape Capital of the World" after her first visit to the DRC.<sup>5</sup> Even international media coverage and celebrity activists like the actor Ben Affleck and his Eastern Congo Initiative have tried to raise awareness about the appalling levels of sexual violence suffered by the women and girls in the eastern DRC.

However, the subject of rape transpiring during war is never easy to discuss or to research. Perhaps this is due to how complex and multifaceted this subject can become because of the numerous internal and external factors associated with it or how emotional people can become when discussing rape and why it occurred. One area which complicates research on this subject is trying to distinguish whether rape is used as a weapon of war, is it a by-product of war, or was it merely a criminal act. Another complication realized is in the number of rapes reported can be skewed because victims of rape do not necessarily come forward and report the rape due to the fear of reprisal by the perpetrators. Lastly, the human element of why a perpetrator commits this act of violence can in itself be extremely complicated to understand.

Regardless of why the subject of rape can be complicated to study, it is important to understand the fundamental motivation of the people who commit these types of violent acts during a war time environment in order to prevent them from occurring as frequently in the future. There are many humanitarian aid programs in the DRC that focus on assisting victims of rape like Raise Hope for Congo and the International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict. Yet, there are few humanitarian aid programs that are aimed at preventing gender based violence. According to Freedman, one of the reasons for this is because programs aimed at preventing sexual and gender based violence fail to place this type of violence into a wider social context like addressing the fundamental causes and motivations which are rooted in

traditional gender roles.<sup>6</sup> Granted the issue of rape in the DRC is far more complex and rooted into a broader framework of varying internal and external factors, but gender relations combined with the militarized environment of the eastern DRC have ignited the age old problem of rape being used as a weapon by the armed groups.

Therefore, if the international community does not comprehend the underlying motivation behind the armed groups or members of these groups using rape as a weapon of war, it cannot effectively create programs in the DRC that prevent rape at the root cause of it. Gender roles and militarism are the primary internal factors contributing to the use of rape as a weapon of war in the eastern DRC and they must be taken into account when developing programs to educate the population in order to prevent this type of action from occurring at its current rates in the future. By understanding these underlying motivations for men to use rape as a weapon of war, then effective preventative programs can be established by the international community and the DRC government to combat this consequence of war.

## **Background**

The complexity of the current conflict in the DRC is deeply rooted in its history and it started with its colonization by Belgium and the brutality associated with it. One way Belgian administrators kept the local population compliant was through the methodical rape of entire villages and by cutting off the heads and hands of the local tribesman who did not bring rubber to the Belgians.<sup>7</sup> Moreover since the end of Belgian colonization, the DRC continued to be plagued with the authoritarian rule of Mobutu Seko. Even under his rule rape was still used as a tool to control the population.<sup>8</sup> The stage was set for the use of rape as a weapon of war in future conflicts because the population had been conditioned for this type of violence.



The War in Rwanda has also contributed greatly to the current day environment in the eastern DRC. Although this war and the genocide which ensued occurred in the DRC's neighboring country, the aftereffects of the war spilled over into its eastern provinces, specifically those of North and South Kivu Provinces. These effects were observed when over two million people fled Rwanda, and most of them settled in eastern provinces of the DRC.<sup>9</sup> It was not only displaced persons spilling over into the DRC but about one million of the Hutus who were responsible for the genocide.<sup>10</sup> The Rwandan Patriotic Front drove these Hutus out of Rwanda into the eastern DRC and now the remnants of this group are still located in this area and are now called the FDLR. These repercussions of the War in Rwanda laid the groundwork for the North and South Kivu Provinces to become the primary areas within the DRC to be plagued with never-ending conflict.

At the conclusion of the War in Rwanda, the situation in the eastern DRC was still very unstable. Rwanda sent in its forces to root out the Hutu's responsible for the genocide in Rwanda. Meanwhile, Uganda also deployed forces into the DRC to protect its ethnic groups residing in the DRC. While this transpired, Congolese rebel groups took up arms with the support of Rwanda and Uganda, with the aim of overthrowing President Mobuto and his government. The Congolese rebels successfully overthrew Mobuto, and once the new president, Laurent Kabila, was established he discarded his foreign sponsors. This created a rift between the countries which resulted in a new wave of violence between multiple countries.

This new conflict is often referred to as the Great African War because there were over nine African countries involved. Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda who once backed Kabila now wanted to overthrow him, whereas Angola, Chad, Libya, Namibia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe backed Kabila's regime. Each country deployed some forces to a variety of areas within the DRC;

however, the major front of this conflict was again in the North and South Kivu Provinces since Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda are on the DRC's eastern borders. For the next five years, the eastern DRC was plagued with more fighting and the systematic use of rape was observed being utilized at high levels.<sup>11</sup>

The War in Rwanda and the Great African War officially concluded respectively in 1994 and in 2003 and what has been discussed thus far is a very simplistic view of what all has transpired. However, it should not diminish the scope of the impact all this discord has had on the internal stability of the DRC today. The magnitude of these wars on the DRC was captured by Marie-Madeleine Kalala, the DRC's Minister of Human Rights, when she said, "Our country experienced two wars that originated in the eastern provinces...there were atrocities such as mass rape, sexual slavery, pillaging, summary execution...3.5 million died, 4 million were displaced, 1.5 million contracted AIDS, and millions were raped."<sup>12</sup> The violence and upheaval from these two wars has had lasting effects and has only contributed to the complicated and continuous conflict prevalent today in the eastern DRC.

Most of these lasting effects are evident with the remnants of all these various armed forces and rebel groups still prominently residing in the North and South Kivu Provinces. There are over 40 known armed groups in the eastern DRC which are geographically depicted by the map located in Appendix A. In order to understand the dynamic environment it is necessary to be familiar with all of these armed groups. Nonetheless, due to time constraints, only four of the main groups were thoroughly examined and they are considered as the primary actors involved in the various conflicts.

The FDLR, which is comprised of the Rwandan Hutu refugees, is considered one of these primary armed groups in the eastern DRC because of the havoc they still inflict on the people this area. Many NGO's in the area report that the FDLR is responsible for the majority of the atrocities committed against the population.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the number of rapes or attacks committed by the FDLR or any other armed group were captured in the U.N.'s peacekeeping forces daily intelligence briefings and the FDLR was always at the top of list for committing the most atrocities like rape.<sup>14</sup> Then there is the Banyamulenge, which are considered the oldest Tutsi ethnic group in the DRC. They are also prevalent in the eastern provinces, although they are mostly located in South Kivu. They have been in the DRC for over 200 years and were able to attain enviable success in the mineral business and farming.<sup>15</sup> When their lands are encroached upon they will go out and retaliate and at times in order to gain more land for their businesses they will attack other communities.

In addition to the FDLR and the Banyamulenge, there are other various armed groups and indigenous populations that need to be examined when studying the complex environment. For example, the Mai-Mai are various different militia groups that have been formed in villages and small towns throughout the DRC especially in the eastern provinces, to protect their population against foreign groups like the FDLR and internal groups like the Banyamulenge. Lastly, the DRC's army, the FARDC, is considered one of these armed groups as well because of the impact they have on the stability in the North and South Kivu Provinces. However, the primary ethnic makeup of the FARDC varies depending on where in the DRC its forces are located.

All of these armed groups have been vying for control of the land because whoever controls the land controls the resources that originate on it. Resources like coltan, gold, copper, and even diamonds are lucrative business opportunities for those that can control the land.

Subsequently, these resources bring wealth and power to the armed groups therefore enabling them to control the local population. Oftentimes, alliances between these armed groups are broken and formed based on who has control of the land and the resources. Even Meger mentions that various armed groups involved in the fighting and violence have shifted alliances amongst each other over the years and they have at one time or another supported or were an adversary of the Congolese or Rwandan governments.<sup>16</sup> This depicts just how complicated the reasons for the current conflict can be and how vigorous and dynamic a process it is to keep track of which armed groups control the land, mines, and resources at any given time.

It is not only wealth and power that some of these groups seek but revenge for the killing of their family or their people. Ethnic strife between the FDLR, the Banyamulenge, and the other indigenous population still exist. This is a part of the lingering effects from the War in Rwanda and the Great African War. An example of this was observed when FARDC units engaged with one another based on ethnic makeup of the units.<sup>17</sup> Another instance where this is observed is with the disarmament and reintegration of internal armed groups into the FARDC.<sup>18</sup> When these ex-combatants are placed with another group within the FARDC, there have been incidents where conflict occurs within that specific unit because of the ethnic composition of that unit and these ex-combatants do not mix.<sup>19</sup> Therefore knowing the ethnic background of soldiers and ex-combatants is important when deciding which units to reintegrate these internal armed groups into or even prior to a unit's movement to a particular region in the eastern DRC.

Another reason for the constant conflict is the widespread poverty among the population. Uninterrupted conflict for the last 20 years has just created a cycle of poverty which permeates every facet of society to where it is estimated that 71 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.<sup>20</sup> Poverty even affects the Congolese government in the form of corruption while

at the same time corruption in the government and businesses contributes to the poverty as well. At the Rwanda and DRC border crossing in Goma, border officials would allow certain people in and out of the country based on how much that person paid them. This was due to the fact that they were not getting paid by their superiors, so they found a way to make money in order to provide for their family.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, illegal resource exploitation and sales deprives the DRC of millions of dollars every year. This type of corruption is seen at every level in the Congolese government, especially out in the eastern provinces and alludes to the ineffective rule of law and the limited span of control the national government truly has.



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*View of the city of Goma from Lake Kivu – January 2011*

This ineffective rule of law also transcends over into holding people accountable for gender based crimes, like rape. Numerous women interviewed at the Heal Africa shelter in Goma would often remark on how they did not feel safe reporting their rape to the authorities in their village or town. One reason they provided was since the perpetrator or perpetrators were

the authorities there was no one else to report the rape to. Another reason was because they would have to pay a fee to even report the rape and many of them did not have enough money to pay for food let alone a fee to report the rape. In addition, they also stated they knew that even if the perpetrators were caught they would not be prosecuted due to how the justice system favors men over women. Moreover, the women would have been found at fault for their own rape because of how women are viewed by men in the DRC. As a result, many of the women stated they just lived with the shame of the rape or being disowned by their husband or family, which was why many of them were in this shelter.<sup>23</sup>

In the eastern DRC, all this conflict, poverty and ineffective law enforcement has led to an all-time low in regards to gender relations which experts have assessed as having a direct correlation to the increase in the quantity of gender based violence, especially rape, taking place.<sup>24</sup> According to UNHCR, this term gender based violence is used to distinguish violence that specifically targets individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their gender. Although this is the case, there are a couple items to clarify in regards to gender based violence. First is that gender based violence can happen to both men and women, even though the majority of the violence is directed towards females in the DRC and gains the most attention across the world. In addition, gender based violence includes various acts of violence such as human trafficking, slavery, forced marriage, domestic abuse, mutilation, and sexual violence. All of these acts transpire in the DRC and are most prominent in the eastern part of the country due to the incessant conflict.

The most talked about and the most internationally recognized form of gender based violence in the eastern DRC is sexual violence. The term sexual violence is applied when referencing the acts of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. In essence, it refers to any act,

attempt, or threat of a sexual nature that results or is likely to result in physical, psychological, and emotional harm.<sup>25</sup> The term that is most often associated with sexual violence is rape, even though sexual harassment can also be considered a part of this as well.

Baaz and Stern take this term of sexual violence and rape and break it down even further by describing the different types of rapes that occur in the eastern DRC. They interviewed various FARDC soldiers who differed in rank and position in the military about why rape happens. The soldiers report to Baaz and Stern the different types of rape that they have seen take place in the various different conflicts. One of the interesting arguments made is that there is a difference between normal lust rape and evil rape. Baaz and Stern mention that the soldiers stated that normal lust rape is when a man has a normal sexual urge they want to get fulfilled, but due to the poverty and conflict the men cannot satisfy this need through normal means like paying a woman for sex, therefore they just assault a woman to satisfy this need. Whereas evil rape is depicted as such because of the level of brutality associated with the actions surrounding the rape such as mutilation taking place or even the killing of the victim. According to the soldiers, it seems that the men who commit these acts of normal and evil rape know it is wrong but do it anyways.<sup>26</sup>

In regards to the various types of mutilation transpiring in the DRC, this normally occurs during and after rape. The type of mutilation that takes place varies depending on the man or group of men committing this act of violence. From the viewpoint of the FARDC soldiers interviewed by Baaz and Stern, the men who commit these evil rapes and mutilations know what they are doing but are mentally unstable or are on drugs. Yet, this type of gender based violence occurs for a variety of reasons not just for sexual satisfaction. These reasons could be lust, drugs and alcohol, depression or even a tactic to conquer land. Nonetheless, the men who commit



these types of violent acts have an internal motivating factor which enables them to follow through with using rape as a weapon of war.

### **Internal Factors Contributing to Rape Being Used as a Weapon of War**

#### *Gender Roles*

Historically, gender roles in the eastern DRC and in urban areas, like the DRC's capital Kinshasa, favor a patrilineal society compared to the rest of the western DRC where a matrilineal society was more prevalent. In the Kingdom of the Kongo which was located in the western areas of the DRC, land was passed down through the mother's side of the family and it was not uncommon for a woman to be in charge of a tribe as its queen.<sup>27</sup> In the western DRC today, the head of the family is often the mother's brother and cousins from the mother's side of the family are considered brothers and sisters. Whereas in the eastern DRC and rural areas, current day gender roles still favor a patrilineal society.<sup>28</sup> The traditional gender roles associated with a patrilineal society are valued and believed by the various armed groups in the eastern DRC and there is not a distinction between these traditional gender roles amongst the groups. Even though certain armed groups have different ethnicities, like the FDLR and Mai-Mai, their views on gender are the same.

Gender roles have defined and divided the various duties and responsibilities within the DRC society. Women in the eastern DRC are expected to be good mothers and hold a caring disposition. According to Lwambo, they are also required to be subordinate, dependent, and sexually available to their husband.<sup>29</sup> They are essentially considered to be the property of their husband. As far as daily responsibilities go, women are duty-bound to do the cooking, cleaning, fetching of water, tending of the crops, and care for all children in the household. In addition to



all these duties, they produce various goods, like baskets, and sell them at markets. Young girls are conditioned to these gender roles from an early age since their mothers usually have their young girls alongside them everywhere they go from fields to the market.<sup>30</sup>

Men on the other hand are expected to be the head of households and provide for their family. They also value the ability to protect their family when necessary. Lwambo also states that men should behave in non-violent ways towards members of their household and community. They should also be responsible, have good negotiating skills, and be problem solvers. Moreover, men ought to lend support to other family and friends.<sup>31</sup> Traditional daily duties include hunting, clearing the forest so women can plant crops, and decision making like what type of crops need to be planted. In urban areas, like the North Kivu city of Goma, men are the wage earners and managers of finances. Furthermore, men provide goods and services not produced in the home.<sup>32</sup> For example, men own restaurants and could be construction workers. Nonetheless in the cities they could modify their role to being a cook or housekeeper out of necessity in order to provide for their family.<sup>33</sup> Like the young girls, young boys are conditioned towards these gender roles from an early age by the men in the family.

These traditional gender roles are also enacted throughout the DRC society. Political and economic institutions are dominated by men and land rights are passed down through the men in the family, except in those areas where it is a matrilineal society. The politically dominated environment is reflected with the number of women holding government positions. According to the Study of Implementation of the UNSCR 1325, the outcome of the 2006 election, the first of its kind in over 46 years, women were elected to only 12 percent of the government, five percent of the senate and eight percent of the parliament and this was even with them making up the majority of the voters.<sup>34</sup> Five years later in 2011, women still only made up about eight percent

of the government.<sup>35</sup> Even in the economic sector, a woman's status is less than man's. Statistics illustrate this with 61.15 percent of the female led households fall below the poverty line, compared to male head of households where only 54.32 percent live below the poverty line. Not only do women fall far below the poverty line but they work primarily in traditional agriculture areas or other informal jobs to bring some income home to the family. If a woman does work outside the home in another capacity, her husband has to approve of it first. Moreover, girls are often not allowed to go school so that they can help with the household. The priority for education is placed on the boys in a family. Consequently, this leads to a higher illiteracy rate among women, 41.1 percent for women versus 14.2 percent for men.<sup>36</sup>

These are just a few of the many gender inequalities seen throughout the Congolese society due to the traditional gender roles men and women see for themselves. These inequalities and traditional gender roles are even observed in the FARDC, where women soldiers are relegated to a traditional type of job for females. According the Baaz and Stern, these types of jobs included health, social services, administration, and cooking to name just a few. This is because women are supposed to have that caring disposition Lwambo discussed and an ability to run a household. Women are not seen as real soldiers by the men in the army because soldiering is seen as a man's job not a woman's. This is interesting to note because based on pre-colonial history women were well known to enter the fight alongside their men and were acknowledged for their bravery in trying to protect their societies.<sup>37</sup> This demonstrates how gender roles have morphed throughout history.

Even though the men did not perceive women as real soldiers, Baaz and Stern found through numerous interviews that the men liked having female soldiers with them because the women could help take care of them sexually, as well as the other traditional roles associated

with being a woman. Yet, when questioned if they would have sex with their female counterparts the answer was no because they viewed the females as one of the boys.<sup>38</sup> Thus one minute the women are seen as a docile and dependent on their male counterparts and the next they are on the same plain as their male counterparts. This only briefly illustrates the very convoluted view male soldiers hold in regards to female soldiers within their ranks. In spite of that, it also establishes that gender roles are complex and can change within a society.

As depicted in this study, these gender inequalities traverse all levels of society starting in the home and they go all the way up to the government. Women are considered second class citizens in the DRC and the Congolese Family Code, which is a Congolese law, helps facilitate this division. It lays out the responsibilities of a man and woman and the code subordinates women in the family by requiring them to obey their husbands, who are recognized as the head of household. Women must move to where the husband wants to live and must ask his permission to work outside the home. However, it is the husband's job to protect and provide for his wife, thus the wife owes her obedience to her husband based on this traditional gender role.<sup>39</sup>

According to Congolese Law, if rape is committed against the wife, this is considered a crime against the honor of the husband.<sup>40</sup> As a result in cultures like the DRC where the woman is seen as the property of a man, an attack on the woman can be perceived as an attack on the man. So if an armed group wants to inflict harm on the men in a particular area or a society, a tactic they can use will be to target the wives, sisters, or mothers because it will humiliate and deeply hurt the men in the community because they were unable to protect their family. This tactic may prevent these men from retaliating due to the shame they feel or they move away from the area altogether. Therefore, if the primary objective of the armed group was to gain access to

a particular piece of land they could use widespread rape across an area in order to clear out the community.

The rape taking place in the DRC is having a drastically negative effect on a society which values the extended family. Due to tradition, women are expected to marry at young age. In urban areas a young woman who is not married is considered a prostitute even if she is not one and is a professional working in the banking industry.<sup>41</sup> Regardless of the woman living in a rural or urban environment, she will contribute to her family whether it is raising siblings or earning extra income for the family until she is married.<sup>42</sup> Due to the patrilineal society in the eastern DRC and rural areas, once a woman is married she now belongs to the husband's family, and it is the responsibility of the husband or his family to take care of her. The woman can remain in contact with her family and the ties often remain strong, but they are not expected to care for her any longer.

Rape in the eastern DRC is changing and disrupting these familial relationships. A father who cannot protect his daughter or sister from being raped by one of the armed groups constantly thinks about how he failed her, because he could not protect her and now no man will want a non-virgin as a wife. Oftentimes a young woman will often be rejected by her family, due to the shame the family faces even though it was not the woman's fault. However, in some cases, it was reported that if the family knew the attacker they would marry their daughter off to the man who committed the rape or accepted money as a compensation.<sup>43</sup> Women who are raped are also being rejected by their husbands and this scenario was captured by a 26 year old woman who was raped by an armed group when she stated "Before my husband loved me so much, but when I was raped he left me."<sup>44</sup> If a man chooses to stay with his wife, oftentimes he does not treat her well afterwards. This type of rejection and treatment is felt by many women who are victims of

rape. A survey conducted by the Sonke Gender Justice Network, Promundo-US and the Institute for Mental Health of Goma interviewed 25 women in an IDP camp outside of Goma. Out of the 25 women interviewed, 70 percent of them were rape victims whose husbands had rejected and left them.<sup>45</sup>

The sexual violence taking place in the DRC is not just related to the ongoing conflict but also the gender roles and inequalities associated with them that make the Congolese society what it is. Traditional gender roles alongside governing laws, like the Congolese Family Code, place women on an unequal status with men. Then the delineation in gender roles makes a woman more susceptible to rape. If women and young girls are the ones tending to the crops and fetching the water while the men are back in the village, they are exposed to armed groups who could take advantage of this opportunity. Since the armed groups value the same ideas surrounding the place of a woman in society, they know where to look to find their targets. They are aware that if they can attack the women of an area they will gain advantage over the men in the community.

Even though both men and women are affected by rape in the DRC, the fact that women are second class citizens make them more vulnerable to rape during peacetime and more so during conflict. This is because in times of conflict such inequalities create a greater power divide between men and women. The inequalities of gender relations are at the heart of the gender based violence occurring in the DRC and this will remain the case unless men and women can be educated on the various different ways they can contribute to an equal society.<sup>46</sup>

*Masculinity*

The concept of masculinity within the Congolese society is another main internal driving factor for why rape is widespread in the eastern DRC and there are several particular traits which are associated with manhood which are considered masculine. Both men and women hold certain expectations of what these men's roles are and what traits they should have. Moreover men are evaluated on how well they fulfill these expectations of being masculine. Some of the dominant ideas revolving around what makes a man a "real" man are that men are the bread winners of the family as well as its protector. However, these ideals are tied to a number of conditions. Lwambo mentions that these conditions include a man's physical aptitude, ability to have children, knowledge and skills, and access to economic resources. However, he claimed that having money did not make a man, but it did help with a man achieving a certain social status within the society.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, a man must have money in order to help friends and family, or to obtain this higher social status.

Mechanic brings a different view to what being masculine means to men in the DRC. He states that being masculine means having a high sex drive, obtaining multiple partners, buying more than one wife, and paying for gifts so that one could receive sex.<sup>48</sup> This view would indicate that money does make the man. However, it is also an indication of the entitlement a man feels in regards to sex. Male soldiers within the FARDC have also spoke about this sense of entitlement to sex. Baaz and Stern noted, that soldiers thought it was acceptable to force a woman to have sex with them, whether it was their wife or a stranger. To them it was normal lust rape, which was acceptable.<sup>49</sup> Other men interviewed for IMAGES were open about their views on their right to have sex with their wife or a woman who may provoke it.<sup>50</sup> Thus, if a women looks like she wants to have sex or her voice sounds a particular way, men think it is

okay to take a woman by force. These views on masculinity and sense of entitlement held by men depict a few reasons why rape is prevalent throughout the Congolese society.

Another critical factor in what manhood entails has actually been deeply entwined into the Congolese society even prior to colonization. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, in order to be a man one would have to fight to prove their manhood. A career in violence predestined a man to social mobility and allowed an upward shift in social status or distinction for one's family. A man's service in an army or a militia meant that this particular status they were striving for could be attained.<sup>51</sup> Even in order to attain manhood, a young boy would have to participate in a coming of age ceremony where they would have to kill a beast like a lion or even a man from an opposing tribe.<sup>52</sup> Today for young boys in armed groups like the FDLR or one of the various Mai-Mai groups, manhood is still not attained until they kill a beast, rape a woman or kill a man.<sup>53</sup> A trait that boys and men of yesteryear and today consistently do not show are signs of weakness or cowardice. This is because any sign of cowardice meant that the young boy was not yet a man and if they favored a more feminine trait it will lead to them being targeted and picked on by their peers because of their perceived vulnerability.<sup>54</sup> Thus, violence seems to have become an expression of a man's power, courage, and valor as well as a rite of passage and it would also depict another reason why rape is so widespread throughout the eastern DRC.

Military institutions or military like institutions, similar to the armed groups found in the DRC, tend to foster attitudes of violence and physical aptitude, which are prevalent ideas of masculinity. Moreover, in a society where women and the feminine traits associate with being female are undervalued, the military institution tries to socialize men towards the aggressive and violent traits of masculinity. According to Meger, these institutions foster the physical and violent form of masculinity to the point that men become desensitized to the ability to commit

violence and become willing to commit such acts.<sup>55</sup> Therefore it should not be surprising that sexual violence occurs during conflict.

Many men are searching for a way to increase their social standing within their society and a way of making this happen in the current environment is by joining an armed group. Since fighting has always been a way to prove one's manhood in this region this decision to join an armed group is an honorable profession and it makes men feel like "real" men. However, men quickly become disillusioned because there is no wealth associated with being in an armed group. Baaz and Stern found that there is deep disappointment among the FARDC soldiers because they envisioned becoming successful. However they find themselves facing the harsh realities of military life.

There are many current day realities facing men in the eastern DRC which are challenging these key ideas of masculinity. Being masculine has become harder for men to achieve due to the never-ending conflict and associated chaos which has permeated all levels of society. There are 2.6 million IDPs in the eastern DRC due to the conflict.<sup>56</sup> This means that families have no homes besides an IDP camp and it is perceived within the Congolese society that a man has been unable to provide for and protect his family. One man in an IDP camp outside of Goma stated, "When I had to leave my properties behind, I felt like they cut my head off. Now I am a man without a head to think; I am nothing anymore."<sup>57</sup> Even FARDC soldiers are not getting paid and are unable to provide for their family.<sup>58</sup> This sentiment is felt by more than just a couple men based on the numerous interviews conducted by countless non-governmental organizations, the United Nations, journalists, and even scholars.



Conflict has also brought with it poverty. According to the CIA World Factbook, over 71 percent of the population in the DRC is below the poverty line.<sup>59</sup> Many men spend more time looking for work than actually working. The result of this poverty translates to the fact that men cannot find employment, which means they are unable to bring money or food home to their family or provide adequate shelter. According to the masculine ideals held by the Congolese, men are supposed to be the breadwinner and providers for the family. However, the extreme poverty inhibits this ideal from becoming reality. As another man interviewed for IMAGES, “What kind of man am I, who is not able to sustain the family.”<sup>60</sup> A consequence of this sense of hopelessness men feel is that they take their frustrations out on their wife or family or they turn to drinking or drugs. They also turn towards various forms of violence.

It is apparent that the ability to provide for one’s family requires money and being able to provide for one’s family is a key idea circulating around what masculinity should entail. Even Congolese law provides a guideline on how men should behave. Masculinity in the DRC also revolves around a man being in control, having power, and being the protector for one’s family. Nonetheless, due the widespread conflict and poverty, many men are unable to act on any of these masculine traits and they feel like they are not really men. According to Mechanic, men have turned towards the ingrained ideas of gender roles in order to feel like a man again.<sup>61</sup> The main trait men have resorted back to is the one that has been ingrained into society for hundreds of years and that is asserting ones power through violence, which includes rape. This trait combined with the one of being the protector of the family makes rape an effective weapon during conflict because attacking the women, family, or tribe is an attempt by the opposing force to humiliate and emasculate the men. It demonstrates the men’s inability to protect their family, therefore striking at their masculine identity in a way to prove them to be inadequate protectors.

Meanwhile, this reinforces the masculine identity held by the attacking group due to the power they felt they had over another group. Couple these traits with the men's views about sex and this provides an understanding of why rape is easy for men to commit and why it has become so widespread during a time of conflict, hence making it an effective weapon of war.

### *Militarism*

Gender roles and masculinity are not the only internal factors which contribute to the abundance of sexual violence or explain why it is so prevalent in the eastern DRC. Another factor that influences sexual violence occurring in the DRC is militarism. In an environment such as the eastern DRC where there has been perpetual violence taking place since at least 1994, the situation has become very militarized. It is not uncommon to see men and young boys of the various armed groups or security guards openly carry weapons and walk down the streets of the villages and towns in the eastern DRC. One reason is because these weapons provide these men and young boys the means by which to protect one's family and property. Another reason is that the weapons are symbols of one's status and social standing in the community which is deeply rooted in their culture. Moreover, men carry weapons as a sign of their masculinity because having a weapon is an outward sign of the power they possess.<sup>62</sup>

Oftentimes, this militarized way of life revolves around men joining an armed group or it is expected that they will fight for their tribe and their community. As a part of this, members of these armed groups are acclimated for a life of violence. According to Cohn, most armed groups socialize their members by breaking down previously held values and beliefs and transpose those to attitudes required for combat. A part of this conditioning process is by depicting the enemy as subhuman, a danger to one's way of life, or a threat to the nation. By portraying the enemy as dangerous, it makes it easier for combatants to justify their actions and helps them overcome any

qualms about committing such types of violence.<sup>63</sup> In the FARDC and the other armed groups men or boys are conditioned to kill on behalf of their nation or group. They are also socialized to be effective members of these groups. Moreover, there is a sense of solidarity built among the members as well as loyalty to the group which is considered another aspect of militarism. Thus, military institutions or military like institutions condition its members towards violence and aggressiveness and this shapes the masculinities of the men who are members of the FARDC and the various other armed groups.

The FARDC and the other various armed groups in the DRC which are shaped by militarized masculinities are also based along patriarchal lines. This combination makes for an institution dominated by men with assertive and potentially violent dispositions. In the interviews conducted by Baaz and Stern with soldiers from the FARDC many of them expressed fears over not being perceived as masculine. A way for these men to reassert their masculinity was by raping women of an opposing armed group therefore violently asserting their masculinity. For many of the soldiers, they knew that rape was wrong whatever form it took, whether it was normal lust rape or evil rape.<sup>64</sup> Despite the type of rape committed, there was one consistent theme throughout and that was a soldier's right to a woman sexually were above a woman's rights to refuse.

Other groups like the Mai-Mai have a very strict chain of command. When they are told to attack a village by their leadership they do so. When they are given orders to rape and pillage they will. This is because they have been conditioned to listen to their leadership without question because for many Mai-Mai their commanders were like father figures.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, some commanders have no qualms about ordering their men to commit rape because to some of them woman are seen as a spoil of war. Then other commanders consider it as retaliation

because their women were raped by another armed group like the FDLR. Regardless of the reasons why men were ordered to rape an opposition group's women, many men are not inclined to refuse these orders for fear of being whipped or another punishment levied against them.<sup>66</sup>

There are a couple of theories in existence which encapsulate these militaristic masculinities while trying to explain why rape is used as a weapon of war. The first provides an explanation as to why rape is utilized during conflict and it is aptly called the patriarchal militarism theory. This theory states that "sexual violence during wartime is motivated by the desire to exert control and power over women and men who are perceived as feminine."<sup>67</sup> This theory represents the power relationship between a man and woman and it tries to explain how rape is a result of a man trying to assert his masculinity.<sup>68</sup> Carlsen also mentions how this power manifests itself in the military which is based on a patrilineal organization and how violence is legitimized as a way to resolve conflict. Therefore, since the armed groups are composed primarily of men, violence is expected to occur as men try to uphold their masculinity. Patriarchal militarism theory also perceives sexual violence as a by-product of war which is aptly captured by Goldstein when he remarks on how rape is a normal occurrence during war thus it should be expected to transpire. Rape is a crime of domination and because war has everything to do with dominating one's opponent, rape is an instrument by which to gain territory and resources.<sup>69</sup> In other words, when war or conflict occurs rape is bound to happen because it is a means by which to resolve a conflict by asserting one's power over another group.

As simple as this theory would appear it is still quite complex because of how patriarchal societies function. In the DRC, the woman may be a second class citizen yet she is still seen as the carrier of the society and without her the society would not exist. Given that women are viewed as the backbone of communities, armed groups effectively target communities and instill

fear into them by violating the women in their most intimate space. Due to the known negative consequence this has on a family and community, systematic rape is committed to destroy the foundation of a family and society. Therefore, this theory is useful when applied to the situation in the DRC because it depicts the patriarchal relationship between men and women in the DRC in addition to reinforcing the ideas behind masculinity and militarized violence against women.

The other theory which tries to explain why rape is utilized as a weapon of war is the strategic violence theory. This theory states that soldiers or members of armed groups will use sexual violence to accomplish strategic objectives like acquiring new land or resources. According to this theory, rape during conflict is a weapon of war and not just a by-product of it. Moreover, soldiers will use sexual violence as a tactic to intimidate and use it as a tool of coercion by instilling fear and terror throughout a community.<sup>70</sup> This theory is applicable to the situation the DRC just for this reason because rape is used by armed groups to force communities to accept their control or to punish them because they have loyalty to another group.<sup>71</sup> When a tribe, village, or town has succumbed to numerous attacks by an armed group they can only endure so many attacks. As previously mentioned, when women and girls are raped by an armed force this is perceived as an attack on the man and continuous assault will eventually destroy the security of the victims and the community. Hence, they will flee allowing the armed groups to occupy and gain control of the land and achieving their objective.

The patriarchal militarism theory and the strategic violence theory are both theoretical frameworks to try to explain why rape is used as a weapon of war. Although they each bring different viewpoints to the forefront, they capture the nuances behind this type of wartime violence. Granted they may appear to support the external factors which drive the violence, but the one consistent theme both of these theories portray is the women's inferior status to men

which illustrates how the internal factors make this violent act easier for men to commit in the first place. Combine this view of gender relations along with the current militarized masculinity overtaking the eastern DRC and it generates a permissive environment for armed groups to engage in sexual violence towards women.

## **Recommendations**

Throughout this research it became readily apparent that there are many programs which assist survivors of rape. Many different international organizations like the United Nations, Heal Africa, Enough, and Doctors Without Borders just to name a few focus on the aftereffects of rape which include medical and psychological help along with ensuring women's security by providing food and shelter. There are also many programs like Heal Africa that educate women on a new skill so they can support themselves and their children since many of women have lost a husband or their family through death or being rejected by them. Programs like these are very well regarded by Congolese women because they do not feel completely defeated and demoralized by what happened to them.

Even though there are numerous great programs available to assist rape survivors, very few focus on how to prevent rape from being used as a weapon of war. Perhaps this is because the explanations behind rape being utilized as a weapon of war are so complex and consist of a variety of interconnected internal and external factors which all have to be considered when battling an epidemic such as this. Since the issue of rape in the DRC is so complicated and embedded into a broader context, a multifaceted approach that targets the variety of factors is essential. However, when evaluating the type of prevention programs that could be established it is crucial that the internal factors are addressed at the same level of importance as concentrating on the external factors like poverty in the area.

Given that the underlying motivation behind the armed groups using rape as a weapon of war revolves around gender relations based on the delineation of traditional gender roles and their militarized masculinity, programs developed will need to be cognizant of this rationale in order for them to be successful. The basis of any program developed should ensure that the men who were a part of an armed group are reintegrated either back into civil society or the FARDC. A part of this reintegration should be education and training geared towards men's views on gender and masculinity and how they can still feel like a "real" man in the current environment of new emerging gender roles without outwardly exerting their power through sexual violence. Additionally, programs developed should educate and inform men that a woman who is raped is a victim and that she is not at fault. This can help reduce the stigma attached to rape survivors and potentially reduce the number of men who leave their wives after they have been raped. Meanwhile, programs that include teaching men a new skill that does not involve being a part of the military or armed group will enable them to feel that they can provide for their family. Any program should emphasize non-military means of addressing any conflicts and that by using non-violent means does not equate to being less of a man. Furthermore, any educational or reintegration programs should be facilitated by a local Congolese man because many NGO's and other international organizations are not trusted by the local men.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, in order for these programs to be effective, a local man who may have had similar experiences will be best suited to facilitate these programs because they are seen as more trustworthy.

These educational programs should also be inserted into early childhood education because many boys and girls have already been exposed to some form of gender based violence at a young age and their education will help them overcome their negative experience. In addition, gender roles are formulated at a young age. Hence addressing it early will also assist in

laying the foundation of gender equality in order to alleviate gender based violence in the future. Regardless of the type of program that is developed, these programs should engage in long term dialogue with men and their communities because the use of rape as a weapon has been ongoing for well over a hundred years and just as it took time for these types of gender behaviors to transpire, it will take just as long to change it. In the end, local and international organizations trying to combat sexual violence will need patience and fortitude to ensure their program becomes successful.

## **Conclusion**

As mentioned throughout this study, making sense of the sexual violence taking place towards women and why rape is used as a weapon of war has not been an easy task due to the complexity of the topic and the conflict in the eastern DRC. In an area of the world where the cycle of violence is propagating more violence and the raping of women has become normalized, it has taken the phrase “the rape capital of the world” coined by Margaret Wallstrom for the situation to gain the international community’s attention. As a result, there have been numerous phrases and words, like gender based violence, rape as a strategy of war, rape as a by-product of war, and even rape as a tactic of war, used to describe why these various different types of cruel acts are committed against women. However, one needs to be careful when describing why gender based violence takes place because it could have negative consequences on the type of prevention programs establish. Nonetheless, the connection between the fundamental motivation of men to commit gender based violence, such as rape, and why it is used as a weapon of war are important to understand.



Initially this study started out by examining each of the various armed groups in the North Kivu Province and trying to understand their views on gender roles and identities, like masculinity, along with militarism in order to answer the question of why rape is used as a weapon of war in the eastern DRC. However, time constraints limited the study to a more broad approach that barely seemed to scrape the surface of an exceptionally intricate problem set. Nevertheless, even at the broad level approach a theme appeared among the three internal factors examined in this study. When gender roles and the views surrounding masculinity are combined with a militaristic environment, the men's desire to appear masculine in an environment where one is expected to fight, show courage and be powerful became their underlying motivation to rape. As basic as it may seem, this internal factor to be masculine or appear masculine in their societies' eyes enabled men to justify their violent acts towards women. Then link this view along with being a member of an armed group whose objective is to gain access to resource rich land and an ideal weapon is created in the minds of these men.

In conclusion, there were only few internal factors examined but this study determined that there are a variety of intricately linked internal and external factors that contribute to the complexity of the situation. Moreover, it discovered that the fundamental motivation for men to commit these acts lies in their views to be perceived as a man. Therefore, if this motivation can be understood the international community can develop educational programs focused around it. An educational approach that incorporates men's internal driving factors of wanting to be perceived as masculine will be a critical step in resolving the sexual violence against women. This approach will not excuse men's violent behavior, nor will it simply just blame them, but it will allow conversations to take place so that gender roles can be redefined for the future. Nevertheless, as long as women are viewed as inferior to men the current levels of rape will

remain the same. Ultimately, it is going to take decades of education to change the views men have of women and of themselves and once this view has changed, then and only then will the Democratic Republic of the Congo not be called the “Rape Capital of the World.”

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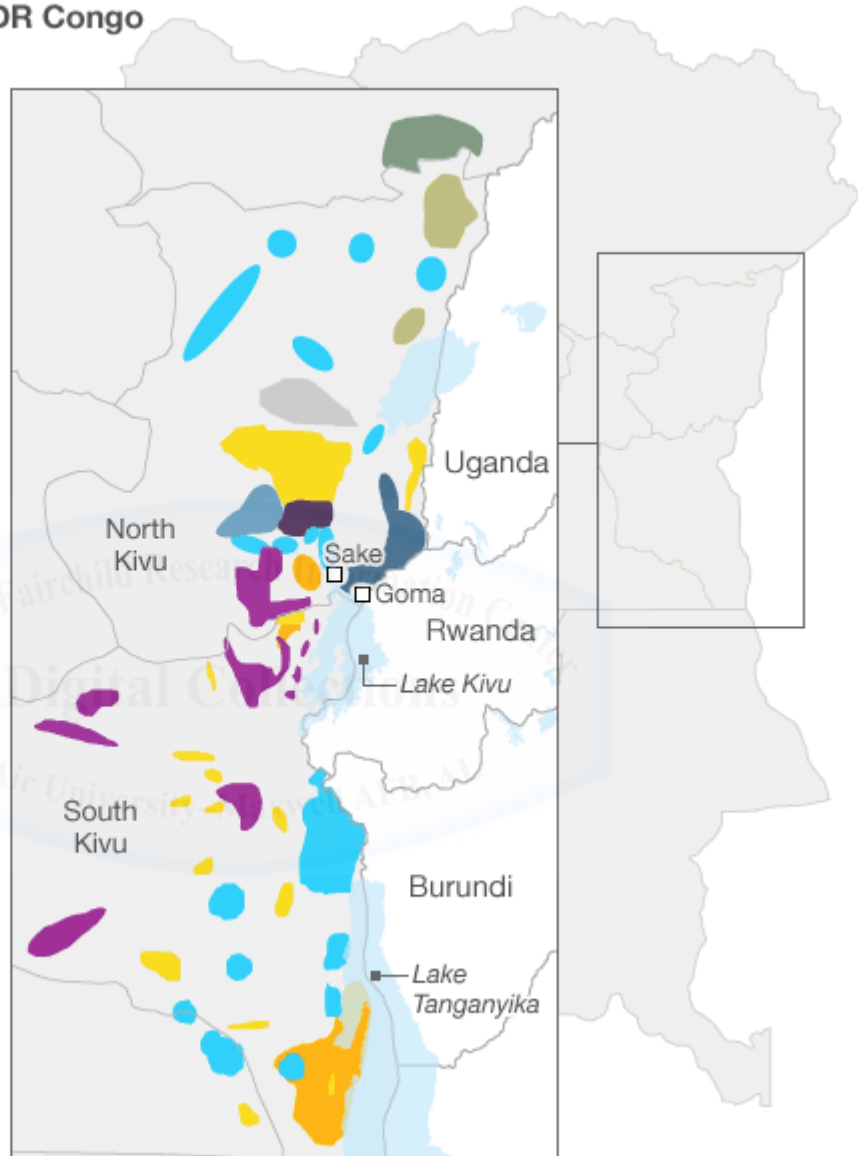


## APPENDIX A

### Rebel groups in eastern DR Congo

UN forces and the Congolese army are present in large towns

- **ADF-NALU**  
Ugandan-led Islamists
- **APCLS**  
Mai Mai group
- **FDLR**  
Mostly Hutu Rwandan rebels
- **FRPI**  
Based in gold-rich Ituri region
- **M23**  
Mostly Tutsi, said to be Rwandan-backed
- **Rai Mutomboki**  
Anti-FDLR group
- **Sheka**  
Mai Mai group
- **UPCP**  
Loose coalition of smaller nationalist groups
- **Mai Mai groups**  
Local forces claiming to act in self-defence
- **Other armed groups**



Source: Oxfam

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CIA – Counter Intelligence Agency

DRC – Democratic Republic of the Congo

FARDC - Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo

FDLR - Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda

HIV/AIDS – Human immunodeficiency virus infection / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome

IDP – Internally Displaced People

IMAGES – International Men and Gender Equality Survey (conducted by Sonke Gender Justice Network)

UN – United Nations

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNSCR – United Nations Security Council Resolution

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